

**METAPHYSICS
OF
MYSTIC EXPERIENCE**

D. R. Khashaba

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PREFACE

Metaphysics and mysticism may be thought to be antithetical. This is to misunderstand both metaphysics and mysticism. Metaphysics by itself is vacuous; no reasoning can give it content. Mystic experience by itself is blind; it cannot be imbued with meaning. Only the wedding of metaphysics to mystic experience can give birth to proper philosophical insight. This is the central message of the philosophy informing all my writings. But to explain this here would be to rewrite the whole book all over again.

This collection of papers falls into two parts: 1. papers written between May and July 2020 on various philosophical subjects; 2. a series of eleven papers titled “Exploring Plato”. Together they constitute a summing up of a lifetime philosophy.

This is the third collection of papers I put forward in a matter of months. Every time I was rushed by untoward circumstances and every time I worked under stress. I beg the Reader's forbearance for the consequent faults. I believe this will be my last work – not by choice but because writing is simply getting beyond me.

D. R. Khashaba

July 29, 2020

CONTENTS

PREFACE

CONTENTS

REASON GOOD AND BAD

WHENCE COMES INSPIRATION?

UNDERSTANDING

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

RATIONALISM AND RATIONALITY

QUINTESSENCE OF MORALITY

ATHEISM AND SCIENCE

PLIGHT OF PHILOSOPHY

PRAYER

NOETIC TRINITY

NUMBER

SUM OF MY PHILOSOPHY

CHRISTIANITY a personal testimony

DEMOGORGON

CURSE OF BABEL

MAZES OF LANGUAGE

KANT'S THREE QUESTIONS

NO HOPE FOR HUMANITY

MIND DOES NOT EXIST

EXPLORING PLATO

I – II – III – IV – V – VI – VII – VIII – IX – X – XI

PART ONE
METAPHYSICS
OF
MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

REASON GOOD AND BAD

In Plotinus, even more clearly than in Plato, we find all that is right and all that is wrong in philosophy set side by side, as obstinately unmixable as oil and water.

Plotinus speculates, argues, theorizes, and all of that amounts to nothing more than an exercise of logical anatomy practised on the cadavres of conceptual fictions. It is all of the selfsame stuff as Plato's ingenious argument for the eternity of the soul in the *Phaedrus*; it is all of the selfsame stuff as the endless controversies about the compatibility or incompatibility of free will with predestination or with causal necessity; it is all of the selfsame stuff as the labyrinthine labours of Analytic philosophers to reach valid conclusions about objective problems by successive dissections of lifeless conceptual fictions.

When will philosophers be wise to the fact that reason works only within pre-set assumptions admitted for the nonce? Plato explains this clearly in his exposition of the method of working with hypotheses in the *Phaedo*, the *Meno*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Republic*.

In mathematics this works because the assumptions are explicitly and clearly conceived. A triangle is a three-sided figure enclosing three angles equal to two right angles. Everything you can know about a triangle is already there in that definition and all you can know of a triangle is only true of a triangle thus understood but not about a non-Euclidean triangle. In the *Meno* ‘experiment’ Socrates simply shows Meno’s ‘boy’, makes him see, that a square constructed on the hypotenuse of another square, comes out enclosing double the space of the ground square. The ‘boy’ does not deduce that; he sees it with his eyes.

In empirical science the ground ‘assumption’ is a set of empirically observed phenomena. The movements of sun, moon, planets, and stars are observed phenomena; the observations can be enhanced and rectified, even completely changed, but the scientist only works with given phenomena, verifiable at the particular stage of observation. The observed movements of sun, planets, stars are

dressed in rational interpretations by Ptolemy, by Copernicus, by Newton, by Einstein: they are all rational as they work rationally within, and are governed by, the agreed set of phenomena; they are all equally rational but differ in the level and degree of satisfaction they give us in making our calculations and predictions about those movements.

ἔδοξε τοίνυν μοι, ἧ δ' ὅς, μετὰ ταῦτα, ἐπειδὴ ἀπειρήκη τὰ ὄντα σκοπῶν, ... ἔδοξε δὴ μοι χρῆναι εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα ἐν ἐκείνοις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν. (*Phaedo* 99d ... 99e)

But all of this is inapplicable to, and has no relevance whatever to, pure ideas of the mind — ideas of values, aims, and purposes, ideas that have no objective being, that are not to be found anywhere in the natural world. The most philosophically valuable ideas of Plotinus, like the most philosophically valuable ideas of Plato, come in flashes of prophetic insight. The moral insight in the teaching of Gautama the Buddha, the moral insight in the best part of the Sermon on the Mount, the moral and metaphysical in-

sight in Boehme or in Eckhart, the moral and the metaphysical insight in Lao Tzu, all of these are of the selfsame stuff, and it is the selfsame stuff in the imaginative flights of Goethe, Schiller, Wordsworth, Shelley. This is wisdom and only this is wisdom.

What we need to grasp, and what in our intellect-ridden world is so hard to grasp, is that reason is a good servant in a well-ordered house. Within the walls it cleans, arranges the furniture, holds a candle to illumine an obscure nook or corner, but outside the walls it strays, stumbles, blabbers insane nonsense even through the mouth of a Leibniz or a Hegel.

In the seventeenth century Adam ate of the forbidden tree. The name of the tree was Reason, the fruit was Knowledge. And Adam saw that he was naked, stripped bare of understanding, stripped bare of wisdom. And ever since he has been hurtling towards the Abyss of Perdition.

D. R. Khashaba

May 28, 2020

WHENCE COMES INSPIRATION?

I find in a nook in my computer the the following note:

“Coleridge quotes Sir John Davies in inspired verses on the soul, which, Coleridge says, ‘may with slight alteration be applied, and even more appropriately, to the poetic IMAGINATION’:

**‘Doubtless this could not be, but that she turns
Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange,
As fire converts to fire the things it burns,
As we our food into our nature change.
From their gross matter she abstracts their forms,
And draws a kind of quintessence from things;
Which to her proper nature she transforms,
To bear them light on her celestial wings.**

Thus does she, when from individual states

**She doth abstract the universal kinds;
Which then re clothed in divers names and fates
Steal access through our senses to our minds.'**

Adapted from John Davies's *Nosce Teipsum* ("Know Thyself"), a philosophical poem (1599)."

I don't want to be a spoilsport, but I think Coleridge ascribes to Sir John Davies more than is his due. The verses quoted (even with Coleridge's adaptation) sound like a feeble representation of Plato's Forms as corrupted by Aristotle. The devil is in the verb 'abstract'.

Had Coleridge consulted his own experience he would have seen that when it is suggested that 'from individual states' the soul (or the imagination) 'doth abstract universal kinds' which are then 're clothed in divers names and fates' — the working of the creative imagination is turned upside down.

Let us, instead of the creative imagination speak of inspiration. In more than one place Plato speaks of poetic inspiration ('divine madness') as coming from God or from the Muses. (*Phaedrus, Ion, Symposium.*) Any creative writer or artist knows the experience. And it does surprise us and makes us feel it 'has come to us' — but from where?

In *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, the philosopher's pilgrimage is accomplished from first to last within the mind and ends in the creative procreation of *aretê* (virtue) and *alêtheia* (reality).

Inspiration – poetic, artistic, philosophic – arises within us, comes from within us. And the only way I can find that intelligible is to see our true essence, our innermost reality, as a creative principle, as pure creativity. And since that is the only reality and all the reality that we know, we may say that metaphysical Reality – the ultimate origin and true nature of Being – is pure Creativity. But modesty demands that we acknowledge that we are speaking of what we find in ourselves and that we are not entitled to speak of the world outside us.

Going back to the working of the imagination I would say that the creative poet or artist has a glimpse of, an insight into, our inmost reality, a glimpse or insight that can never be adequately conveyed in conceptual terms. The poet or artist intimates the insight in images, forms, sound patterns, colour patterns.

The mystic gives expression to the insight in arcane symbols or in images and thought patterns derived from her or his religious heritage.

Plato at his best intimates his insights in imaginative flights and in myths and parables. In the *Republic*, having alluded to the profoundest philosophic insight as the Form of the Good, proclaims it impossible to say anything of the Form of the Good; all we can say is that all life, all intelligence, all excellence come from the Form of the Good.

Following in the footsteps of Plato, I give the ineffable source and fount of all being, all life, all goodness, all intelligence, the name of Creative Eternity.

D. R. Khashaba

May 29, 2020

UNDERSTANDING

**“I understood the stillness above the sky
But never the words of men.”**

(Hölderlin. “When I was a boy”, translated by David Constantine.)

The above-quoted words of Hölderlin reveal the true nature of understanding. Understanding is an aesthetic state, is the luminosity of subjectivity, is the song of life in a butterfly or a flower, untranslatable in cognitive terms. All our fevered craving for knowledge, for explanation, our search for causes — all of that is wandering in darkness. We have understanding when soul speaks to soul. We enjoy understanding when we read love in the eyes of one we love. True poetry, true art, true philosophy, seeks to inspire us with that understanding.

Knowledge became needful for humans when they separated themselves from nature and took it upon themselves to care for themselves. For humans knowledge is not only power: for them knowledge is security and comfort. But when engrossed in the search for knowledge we become alienated from our true nature. The more world-oriented we become the more bereft of true life we become. The search for knowledge, in distancing us from our inner life and inner reality, distances us from true understanding.

D. R. Khashaba

May 29, 2020

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

In China and India there was Wisdom.

In Babylonia and Egypt there was Knowledge.

In Ionia the marriage of Knowledge and Wisdom pro-created the joined twin Philosophy and Science.

Two arms had Baby Science, Thales and Pythagoras.

Two arms had Baby Philosophy, Heraclitus and Xenophanes.

Socrates performed the delicate surgery of separating the joined twins.

Thereafter thinkers thinking themselves wise confounded the two and forced them into incestuous union.

The monstrosity gave birth to foolish knowledge and blind philosophy.

Dear Reader, you are at liberty to take this as nothing but ravings of a senile nonagenarian or as a riddle the clue to which I have spent a lifetime disclosing.

D. R. Khashaba

May 31, 2020

RATIONALISM AND RATIONALITY

Argument in philosophy is worse than futile.

Reasoning in philosophy is peripheral and essentially irrelevant.

Shocked? Hold your breath! You are still at the threshold.

Th *Phaedo* is the profoundest, most precious, most inspiring work of Plato's and it is the most self-contradictory and most nonsensical.

It gives proof after proof of the immortality of the soul and every proof ends with an overt or a covert admission that it proves nothing and if that escapes the reader, and if the learned in olden times were too shy or too pious to point it out, the recent and present-day erudite revel in parading the contradictions, inconsistencies, and falsities.

Yet in the midst of all this Socrates warns us against misology (89d) and in this he is not ironical but is in full earnest.

What Socrates advocates, what Socrates sees as the condition of human freedom and human dignity, is not rationalism but rationality, not submission to the decree of reason but intelligent living; not occasional or even habitual application of intellectual scrutiny but the life of creative intelligence that can apprehend the self-evidence of a paradox in comprehending the whole that gives the paradox intelligibility. Plato names this creative intelligence *phronêsis*.

I will give one example to show how a contradiction can be the sign of richness of thought. In the *Phaedo*, after Plato introduces the notion of intelligible Ideas (Forms) opposed to perceptible objects, he goes on to panegyrize at great length – indeed to apotheosize – the intelligible Ideas, and to emphasize their constancy and immutability (see especially 78d). It was this that led to Aristotle's error in asserting that Plato held that the Ideas (Forms) have a separate existence. I have repeatedly tried to correct this error, an error inherited by learned scholars and insisted on by them to this day. I said (1) that what is said by Plato

in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* is imaginative poetry; (2) that Plato saw the impossibility of expressing in conceptual terms the relation between the idea and the object and showed this clearly in the First Part of the *Parmenides*; (3) that in the *Sophist* he clearly, expressly, explicitly pronounces the error of maintaining the fixity and immutability of the Forms. I stated that in maybe a dozen or more different places. I also explained repeatedly and at length that the true nature and meaning of the intelligible ideas is given in the ‘autobiographical’ passage of the *Phaedo* (95e-100e).

Yet what Plato wrote in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* just as it misled Aristotle and the scholars that followed him it has also inspired poets and genuine philosophers. It inspired not only Shelley and Emerson but also Whitehead and Santayana both of whom speak of eternal ideas. I do not want to expand on the insight in Plato’s emphasis on the constancy and immutability of the Forms. The whole of my philosophy has that insight at its heart. (See *Creative Eternity*, 2016, and *In Praise of Philosophical Ignorance*, 2016.) What I want to say here is that, to understand a profound philosopher, we have to see his contradictions as signifying the profundity of her or his insight. This is imaginative rationality as opposed to constricted rationalism.

Dear Reader, what I have been saying may be as dark as Heraclitus's darkest sayings. If it has hinted any nebulous meaning to you or even if it has incited you to discover how I could slide into this incomprehensible nonsense, I do not regret the torment my near-blind eyes have made me undergo to write this and a dozen times correct and re-correct the inevitable typos.

D. R. Khashaba

May 31, 2020

QUINTESSENCE OF MORALITY

The property of conceptual thinking which gives human beings their distinctive character within the Animal Family does not come as an unmixed blessing. As it enables some humans to create ideal worlds of beauty and amity and benevolence so it enables others to live in worlds of vainglory and power or of sensual pleasure. A saint, a tyrant, a money worshipper, a pleasure seeker are equally ‘rational’ in their choice of a kind of life on the grounds of their adopted ‘values’. So Socrates could not persuade either Thrasymachus or Calicles or even Alcibiades of the superiority of his own way of life. This, to my mind, shows the error of trying to ground ethics on pure reason.

There is however one and only one way of justifying the choice of virtue, namely, when we see virtue as the fulfillment of the specific perfection of a human being. This

ideal of virtue as the perfection of the humanity of a human being cannot be expressed in a determinate formulation of thought or language.

Socrates saw it as the wholesomeness of a wholesome soul (mind) and for him morality consisted in caring for the wholesomeness of one's soul. Jesus of Nazareth saw it in meekness and purity of heart and love for all even those who pose as our enemies and injure us. Kant saw it in a good will and though he bound that good will by duty the pith and core of duty was clearly to do good to all humans who are always to be seen as ends in themselves.

But I have found in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* a most beautiful representation of the ideal of morality. In the first Chapter of the first Part Zarathustra addresses the Sun:

“Thou great star! What would be thy happiness if thou hadst not those for whom thou shinest!”

That is the finest expression of the ideal of morality: Morality is an outflow, a perpetual giving. Plato in the *Republic* represents the ultimate, unfathomable, ineffable

Reality as the Form of the Good that brings forth life and intelligence and growth and being. The proper conception of goodness is a conception of creative loving giving out of its own fullness. In the *Symposium* Plato represents this as procreation in beauty, *tokos en kalôi*. That is the quintessence of morality.

D. R. Khashaba

June 2, 2020

ATHEISM AND SCIENCE

The term ‘atheism’ is in itself and by itself so vague as to be practically meaningless. You cannot deny the existence of God or any god without having a definite meaning for the term ‘god’. Commonly in Western culture to deny the existence of God is taken to mean denying the existence of the Abrahamic God (or any one of the three distinct Gods of the Hebrew scriptures, the New Testament, and the Quran.) More commonly nowadays perhaps atheism means the positive belief that the physical world is all the reality there is. This, to my mind, is philosophically inane, since I find it incomprehensible to see physical objects as having being in themselves and by themselves. The atoms of Democritus or of Lucretius were tiny indivisible bodies but modern science – especially since the advent of Quantum Mechanics – no longer has any idea what physical things ultimately and finally are. Thus atheism in this

last sense amounts to asserting the unreality of subjectivity and of the subjective realm with all of its ideals and values and emotions and sentiments. When I persistently refused to call myself an atheist I meant to affirm the reality of the subjective world and to insist that our ideals and dreams, our creative spontaneity in deed and thought — that these are the reality we know and experience immediately and indubitably.

The above lines sum up the position I have been advancing and defending in all my writings and I thought I had nothing more to say on the subject. But when I came upon an article in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy by Professor James Taylor titled “The New Atheists” I thought I might give it a look (or in my case, a hearing) to see if I can say anything further.

I do not find much calling for comment. The article presents a balanced critical review of the work of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. These four have been loud-voiced and have attracted much attention during the past three decades but I think they have not said anything that had not been said earlier and better. Professor Taylor justly remarks: “It is difficult to identify anything philosophically unprecedented-

ed in their positions and arguments”. I find one point which, though not new, deserves a word of comment because it relates to a position that is still very much with us. Early in Professor Taylor’s article we read:

“They believe empirical science is the only (or at least the best) basis for genuine knowledge of the world, and they insist that a belief can be epistemically justified only if it is based on adequate evidence.”

This of course is the scientific dogma which has done and continues to do much harm. I am not going to repeat here what I have harped on in all my writings concerning the proper limits of scientific knowledge. I simply can’t understand how Kant’s limitation of empirical investigation to the sphere of phenomena has been ignored by both scientists and philosophers. The fact that philosophers have been foolishly dabbling in questions proper to science helped to perpetrate this error. Of all major twentieth-century thinkers Einstein was the one who thought scientifically when dealing with scientific questions and philosophically when dealing with questions outside the sphere

of science. Bertrand Russell kept his thinking in two non-communicating compartments, one for his ‘technical philosophy’ and one for free reflection on moral, social, and political questions. Even the admirable Stephen Hawking could not keep scientific and non-scientific questions un-mixed. Regrettably I cannot go beyond these generalities here but in all my writings I have insisted on two things: (1) (a) The proper limits of science and (b) the proper limits of pure reason — in this agreeing with Kant. (2) The special nature of (metaphysical) philosophy as an imaginative creative activity that has nothing to do with factual actuality and that creates visions which constitute the spiritual plane of our being. This view, rooted in Socrates-Plato, is, I claim, in the developed form I present, original. I further claim that, as so developed, this special understanding of the nature of philosophical thinking is a badly needed contribution to our human cultural heritage.

D. R. Khashaba

June 2, 2020

PLIGHT OF PHILOSOPHY

Western science and philosophy may plausibly be said to have begun contemporaneously in Ionia some twenty-six centuries ago, building on foundations earlier laid down in Egypt and Babylonia. For some twenty-two centuries, while philosophy loitered in byways and circuitous paths, science moved forward by tentative, sometimes erratic, but on the whole steady footsteps. During the past five centuries, while philosophy continued her fruitless wanderings, there was a wild rush of progress in science and technology so that today we live in a world that only a hundred years ago was unimaginable. In consequence of the combination of philosophic stagnation with scientific and technological progress humanity is in a catastrophic conjunction of surfeit of knowledge and poverty of understanding.

What is it that led to this deleterious abnegation of the role of philosophy? It I, in my view, that philosophers in the Western tradition (as opposed to the sages of India and China) mistook the true nature of philosophy by confounding it with mathematics and science.

Philosophy, pure and simple, addresses two classes of puzzlements that irked thoughtful humans from the earliest times. In brief these are: (1) What is the meaning and purpose of life? Call this the Moral Problem (2) Why or how is it that there is anything rather than nothing? A variant of this same puzzle takes the form of the question: What is ultimate Reality (Being)? Call this the Metaphysical Problem.

The earliest Greek thinkers were primarily and for the most part interested in mathematical and scientific questions but individual thinkers here or there raised one or the other of the two questions of what I have termed pure philosophy. Thus among the Pre-Socratics Xenophanes, we may say, was concerned with the Moral Problem and Parmenides was concerned with the Metaphysical Problem.

Socrates was wholly concerned with the good human life. He spent his life going around exhorting people to care

for the health of their inner being (soul) and prodding them to examine their minds to clear off false ideals and values and clear away confusions and entanglements in their aims and purposes. He saw clearly that the investigation of things and happenings in the natural world had no relevance to his moral concerns. Objective knowledge cannot give moral insight and moral insight cannot yield factual knowledge.

Then came Plato who gave philosophy the most precious of treasures and encumbered philosophy with the most pernicious of errors. A. N. Whitehead's characterization of Western philosophy as a series of footnotes to Plato has become proverbial. Emerson's dictum that Plato is philosophy and philosophy Plato has been often quoted. But a majority of modern scholars find nothing in Plato but falsehoods and gross errors.

The truth is that Plato was not one but four: dramatist, prophet, poet, and mathematician. The four met and jostled but did not, could not, mix. To do justice to Plato we have to keep the four Platos separate.

Plato was a born poet. In his youth, we are told, he put his hand to drama. But Socrates came his way and he was captivated by Socrates' character and way of life. What he

got from Socrates was not a philosophy but a religion, the religion of the philosophic life. When Socrates was put to death in accordance with a sentence passed on him by his Athenian judges Plato was for a time disoriented. He needed to collect himself. He spent a number of years travelling away from home. Then he began writing short dramatic pieces in which he gave us a portrait throbbing with life of Socrates' person and character and the gist of his (Socrates') philosophy of life.

The dramatic pieces soon, very soon, showed dramatic genius. In many of the 'middle dialogues' the dramatic interest is supreme and many of the 'errors' and 'contradictions' critics detect in them are dramatic touches, true to character or situation.

In one of the most influential, most inspiring, and also most translated, of the dialogues, the *Phaedo*, we find the four 'Platos' side by side. There is the prophet preaching the religion of the philosophic life in inspired and inspiring sermons. Throughout we find flights of poetic imagination. We find a moving scenario of the last moments of a great soul. We find long arguments and astute reasoning which end in nothing. It is in these faulty 'proofs' that our erudite scholars revel.

I said early above that what I call pure philosophy addresses one or both of two problems: the Moral and the Metaphysical. While Socrates was concerned solely with the first of these Plato pondered both. Plato was clear-sighted enough to see that about ultimate Reality we can know nothing but at the same time we cannot escape facing the question. To dump the question is to negate a dimension of our inmost being. Most clearly in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*, we have an account of the philosophic journey which begins and ends in the mind — ends in a mystic vision of our own inner reality. This vision is as ineffable as it is unfathomable. It can only be intimated poetically, in oracular pronouncements, in myth and parable. In the *Republic* it is symbolized by the Form of the Good, represented by the simile of the sun which is the source of light and the donor of life and growth. Are we deceiving ourselves when we identify our idea of ultimate Reality with the mystic vision of our inner reality? No, because it is this vision that gives us integrity and leads us to the freedom of creative spontaneity in moral deeds and in works of art, poetry, and philosophy.

We have rambled far from the plight of philosophy, but only seemingly. For twenty-six centuries philosophers, even the divine Plotinus, have been fooling themselves, la-

bouring by strenuous argument and stringent reasoning to attain knowledge of ultimate Reality and our own reality, thereby making laughing stocks of themselves because they failed to absorb what Socrates clearly saw: Objective knowledge cannot give philosophic understanding and philosophic understanding cannot yield factual knowledge.

When philosophy was judged to be nonsensical we were left at the mercy of all-powerful science and technology — all-powerful but blind. Our haughty AI and IT, bereft of wisdom, are driving humanity to its final doom. The only glimpses of insight, of wisdom, have been coming from poets and artists. Philosophers have their proper place with these and must declare it loud and clear, that philosophy is poetry that gives us enlightening visions of values and aims and spiritual realities. Only these visions, these dreams, infused into human culture and disseminated among the members of humanity all over the Planet, can save humanity.

For over two decades I have been harping on this. Now, drawing towards the close of my ninety-third year, let this be my parting message.

D. R. Khashaba

June 4, 2020

PRAYER

Many years ago a relative of mine asked me, rather challenged me: "Do you pray? To whom?" I did not answer as I did not think he wanted an answer or expected an answer. But the question is a good one and deserves an answer.

We all pray. But in saying this I am using the word ambiguously, loading it with two distinct senses.

In the simpler, more common sense, we pray when we are distressed or faced with dire prospects; we pray for help and support. We revert, it seems, to our childhood and run for help and comfort to Mother or Father. Jesus of Nazareth struck the right note when he taught his followers to address 'our Father' in prayer.

On a deeper level, in serene solitude, we – at any rate the more fortunate of us – are deep in the still waters of our inner being, at peace with ourselves and with all being. This is what Whitehead meant when he defined religion as what a person does with his solitariness. For in that blissful solitariness we are least solitary. We feel we are one with the All, merged in the All. This is the quintessence of mystic experience.

I suppose this is what Socrates experienced when he lost himself in profound concentration as in that instance – related by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* – when he remained standing from early morning one day to sunrise on the following day.

Thus I would say that, with the exception perhaps of the unfortunate ones who have lost all trace of humanity, all humans pray in the one sense of the term or the other. The commoner, simpler mode is true prayer; the deeper mode is the best of prayer.

D. R. Khashaba

June 6, 2020

NOETIC TRINITY

I

Plato famously divided the soul (*psuchē, mous*) into three parts. This seems to have been one of those theoretical ventures for which Plato enthused for a while then silently dropped. In the *Phaedo*, in psychic conflict, the mind is simply set against the body. In the *Phaedrus* Plato introduces the simile of chariot, charioteer, good horse, and unruly horse. It seems that it is this simile that suggested the separation in the *Republic* of three faculties and three virtues corresponding to the three classes of society. It is an irritating trait in Plato and at the same time a saving merit that in matters of theory he does not stick to one view for long.

But in starting this note it was not my intention to take up Plato's tripartite division of the mind (soul) but to suggest another, more significant, mental trinity. I think we

have much to gain and would be removing a source of much confusion and grave error if we recognise in the mid three distinct and different powers: (1) Cognition; (2) Reason; and (3) Imagination.

II

COGNITION

To Cognition pertains all knowledge. All that we know, as Empiricists have long insisted, originates in experience. I need not give many instances. From the moment a newborn baby experiences sight and hearing and touch it begins building up its cognitive realm. All of our common knowledge and all of our science up to the latest data collected from outer space and the latest AI and IT sophistications falls within the realm of knowledge based on and originating from experience. Kant agrees with this. Epistemologists and epistemologies are mostly confined to this realm.

REASON

Reason is a regulative power; its gift is coherence. It orders ideas and relates them; analyses them and synthesizes them. I want to insist on and emphasize the separateness of this power. All logic and all mathematics; all deductive reasoning and all abstract proof and argumentation are

governed by this power. The error of Rationalists lies in extending this power to all cognition. When Descartes derived from the Cognito the rules for correct thinking he was limited to the realm of this power. Had scientists from Descartes' time onwards been ruled by his rules we would have been to this day confined to Aristotle's science (though what positive science Aristotle had was obtained empirically).

IMAGINATION

Imagination is a creative power. All ideals, aims, and values – the substance of morality – that give us our distinctive human character and that constitute the realities of our spiritual plane of being; all the prophetic inspirations that gave us the gods and the one God; all poetry and all art; the philosophic and metaphysical notions of soul and Reality and of the Whole and the All; those are creations of this power. All poetic flights, all philosophic aspirations, all “devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow” is the gift of Imagination.

III

It is our ignorance of this that has condemned philosophy to its being for so long lost in the wildernesses of fake Empiricism and fake Rationalism, of pseudo-science and pseudo-mathematics. I loudly proclaim that philosophy is

poetry in the strictest, fullest sense. In offering expositions of their thoughts philosophers may make use of empirical facts for exemplification and may make use of reasoning for elucidation and explication, but fancying that they seek knowledge of the objective world or that they seek deductive demonstrable conclusions by pure reasoning _ this is what made them the butt of ridicule.

IV

For indeed it is odd that we have for so long been ignoring that we are creators, that the very essence and core of our inmost being and reality is creativity and nothing but creativity. Our simplest actions and simplest deeds are spontaneous acts of free creation. No causality, no neuroscientific sophistication can explain the simple act of my stretching my hand to take up my cup of coffee. It is doubly odd that we belie our own immediate and indubitable experience of freedom in favour of the fiction of causal necessity. It is our sinful attachment to the dubious material benefits of science and technology that thus blinds us.

V

Although Plato stated repeatedly that when the philosophic mind attains the goal of its Pilgrim's Progress it creates virtue and reality, and represented this creativity as giving birth in beauty, yet when he spoke of poetic inspiration, he

thought of that inspiration as coming from outside, from the gods or the Muses, since he lacked the notion of creative imagination. This was Plato's most serious failure. That is why he failed to make pure ideas originate in the mind as creations of the mind and had to have recourse to the myth of reminiscence. That is why he saddled himself with the silly notion of poetry and art as *mimēsis*, a silly notion indeed for one who was himself a poet and a creator living moreover in an epoch of highest creativity.

VI

SUMMING UP:

Cognition is acquisitive and builds up our store of factual knowledge.

Reason is regulative and gives us coherence and formal correctness and certainty but in itself is vacant, 'says nothing' as Wittgenstein tells us.

Imagination is creative and gives us all our ideals, all our metaphysical visions, and all the spiritual realities that make up our spiritual plane of being. Alone here do we enjoy the luminous self-evident intelligibility of reality, and this alone I would name understanding if the term 'understanding' had not been much hackneyed.

All intrusion by one of these powers into the domain of another breeds gross error.

Dear Reader, you might ask me where I stand in what I have written above and in most of what I have been writing. My answer is that the miserable state I found philosophy in constrained me in the greater part of my writings not to philosophize, not to ‘do philosophy’, but to think and write about philosophy, to fight to rescue philosophy from the bad company she has fallen in with and reinstate her in her rightful place in the blessed company of poetry and art. In fairness to myself I may add that the substance of my philosophy of Creative Eternity is truly a gift of Creative Imagination.

D. R. Khashaba

June 8, 2020

NUMBER

What is number? Don't ask a mathematician. Mathematicians work wonders with numbers, do miracles with numbers; they work with numbers as tools, they think in numbers, but they do not think about numbers. Numbers are for them so real that they believe them to be an integral part of the constitution of the world.

I cannot see Number that way. To my mind there are no numbers in the natural world. I venture to suggest an imaginative scenario of how numbers came about.

I imagine that for the most primitive of humans one rock, two rocks, ten rocks lying together are simply different visual configurations. In time the dual is bound to force itself on the attention of this or that individual because we have two legs, two arms, two eyes, two ears. Then that individual, being intelligent, would see that the same 'form' reappears in trees, deers, rods.

The form Two having been established and named, its opposition to and distinctness from the single is next noted. In opposition to the duality named Two, the single is named One. I do not think that the notion One was arrived at before the notion Two. One by itself and in itself means nothing. A single object is a tree, a hare, a boy, but does not assume the form One until it is opposed to the form of the dual.

Next an inventive genius notes that to the Two we can adjoin One, and names the new formation Three. But perhaps before the Three and before the Four there came the Five because our five fingers form a distinctive configuration..

After that it is easy to come by the idea of successively adding ‘Ones’ to make new formations that are given distinctive names. The Ten would be a natural early stop for the obvious reason that we have ten fingers. The idea that we can go on making and naming new numbers without end would in time inevitably come about.

However the abstract idea of Infinity would not come about until much later when humans would have delved far into the realms of pure abstract thinking.

The imaginative sketch I have given above may seem fanciful but I believe it agrees with the insight in Socrates’

assertion that One becomes One only by the idea of unity and Two becomes Two only by the idea of duality, this being a special instance of the fundamental Socratic-Platonic insight that all things become for us what they are for us in virtue of the ideas the mind confers on things. (*Phaedo passim*, especially 95e-101e.) My sketch also agrees with the insight underlying Kant's assertion that $7+5=12$ is a synthetic *a priori* judgment.

D. R. Khashaba

June 9, 2020

SUM OF MY PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY

To philosophize is to examine ourselves.

To genuinely examine ourselves is to understand ourselves.

To understand ourselves is to be in possession of ourselves.

To understand ourselves and be in possession of ourselves is, in terms of Spinoza's philosophy, to have adequate ideas and to act.

To act under adequate ideas is autonomy and that is freedom on the elementary level.

For Spinoza behavior under inadequate ideas is passion.

For Socrates when we understand ourselves we have *epistêmê* and virtue; when we are bereft of self-understanding that is ignorance, and vice is nothing other than that.

All of that I learned from Socrates.

METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics is the call of the mysterious.

We aspire to the All, to union with the Whole.

But the All we aspire to is not outside us, the Whole we yearn for is our own inner reality.

I see our inner reality as creative intelligence, intelligent creativity.

That intelligent creativity breeds all poetry and all art and that is true freedom, freedom on the higher level.

Poets intimate their insight into their inner reality in imaginative images; painters in formations of shapes and colours; musicians in sound forms.

Philosophers intimate their insight into their inner reality in conceptual formulations.

MYTH

Our intelligent creativity also breeds all oracular proclamation of the Beyond and the Divine.

That is to project our insight into our inner reality outwards. Rightly understood, that is mythology.

To my mind, the All, the Whole, ultimate Reality is only intelligible as intelligent, good, creative: as Creative Intelligence, Intelligent Creativity, that I name Creative Eternity.

SPECULATION

All understanding is interpretation.

You do not understand what is spoken to you.

You interpret what is spoken to you in terms of the conceptual formulations in your mind.

You do not understand what you read.

You interpret what you read in terms of the conceptual formulations in your mind, in other words, in the framework of your cultural set-up, inherited, acquired, and creatively developed.

All things outside us, in themselves and by themselves, have no meaning.

All things outside us have what meaning they have for us in virtue of the ideas (forms) our mind confers on them.

(I have been looking for a point where to stop and say: This Plato taught me. But, although I am deeply indebted to Plato in every part of my philosophy, what I have learned from Plato has always come as in a dream with much mixture of my own that it is difficult to specify. I leave it to the Reader to decide where I echo Plato, where I modify, where I differ.)

MORALS

Human virtue, human goodness, is perfection in that which distinguishes human beings as human beings.

To be good therefore is to be creatively intelligent.

Creative intelligence is overflow of our inmost being.

That is love, amity, benevolence, mercy, and all virtue.

What ails our human community is that false aims and false values blind us to our true reality and our true good.

There is no evil in the natural world. The only evil is human evil and that is nothing but ignorance.

Socrates' moral philosophy, Kant's moral philosophy, what is best in Christianity, can all be reduced to that.

That is so simple, but humanity is so sunk in ignorance and moral and spiritual blindness that the present-day proximity and inter-dependence of human groups all over the world, instead of boding good, is almost certain to make ultimate doom inevitable.

D. R. Khashaba

June 11, 2020

CHRISTIANITY

a personal testimony

I

Two factors made me into what I am, or rather, contributed what is in me of good, leaving out the negative influences and experiences of an unfortunate life that tarnished and corrupted much in me. In leaving out these bad elements I am not cheating or falsifying: this would have been the case if this testimony were meant as a confession, but it is not: it is an objective review of its subject-matter.

The two formative factors in my making were, first my

Christian upbringing by good, loving, Christian parents in a good, loving, Christian family. The second factor was my early encounter with Plato. What I owe to Plato is set out in all my writings. In this paper I want to give a brief account of my wrestling with Christianity.

II

The parallelism and simultaneous contrast in what we know about Socrates and Jesus is striking. About the life and death of Socrates we know some facts, very few but historically as ascertained as anything we know about Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar. He was born around 469BCE and was executed in 399BCE. He was married and had three children and we know of a couple of remarkable events in his life. About his thought and way of life there is no such certainty. Contemporary sources and scholars old and modern differ widely. For myself I feel confident that Plato's *Apology* and the first part of the *Crito* give us a true account of Socrates' thought and manner of life.

Concerning Jesus, while his very historical existence

has been questioned, we have about his life and teaching ample material but all of it not only can claim no certainty but is also replete with what is unbelievable, incredible and downright contradictory. Yet I believe we can imaginatively extract an intrinsically precious core.

(In what follows quotations from the Gospels follow *The American Standard Translation of the Holy Bible*.)

III

Let us say that Jesus was born around 4BCE; he was intelligent, sensitive, abounding in love of life and love of all being. He was brought up in the Judaic faith and imbibed the Judaic prophetic culture. Early in his youth he could not fail to observe the flagrant discord and contradictions between the pretensions and professions of religious leaders - Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes - on the one hand and their own ways and deeds. True to his Judaic prophetic tradition he spoke from the fullness of his heart.

He preached a religion of purity and inwardness. He

rebuked the Pharisees and the Scribes for their stringent literal understanding of the Scriptures:

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

“They clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”

“Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”

The morality Jesus preached is condensed in the following lines:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

“And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

IV

What happened immediately after the crucifixion of Jesus is uncertain and unclear. The four accounts given at the end of the four canonical Gospels differ not only in incidental details but, more seriously, in essentials. I will first give my conjectural impression before seeking support for my views in the New Testament.

No part of the New Testament can be confidently regarded as personal or contemporary evidence. It all bears the stamp of Paul of Tarsus who effectively introduced a whole new religion.

It seems likely that soon after the crucifixion of Jesus a few of his disciples got over their shock and dismay, pulled themselves together, and sought to perpetuate his teaching. As this was critical of the authoritative Jewish establishment, and could be seen as subversive, they were persecuted. It is not possible to be certain as to what they actually taught and to what extent it was based on what Jesus had actually taught or thought, apart from his morals of love and good deeds. It is also uncertain how many those missionary disciples were and to what extent their teaching was unified. But if there was active persecution, then it is likely that they had followers.

V

Saul (Paul) of Tarsus was a Jew who had obtained Roman citizenship. I do not want to make much of this but per-

haps it tells us something of the man. For a time he took part in tracking down and reporting those who spread the teachings of Jesus: in what capacity he did that I don't know, but I don't think it likely that he did it in his private capacity for case-to-case reward. Then he seems to have had a 'miraculous' experience which 'converted' him. He re-thought the Judaic Messiah prophetic tradition and completely transfigured it. In the Hebrew Scriptures the Messiah (the Anointed, Christ) was a promised leader to free the Jews from foreign subjection and become King of the Jews. Did the mocking inscription put on top of the cross of Jesus inspire Paul with his revolutionary new religion? Jesus was – as Paul came to believe - the Messiah, but he did not come for freeing the Jews from foreign dominion and becoming their king. He was in truth the Son of God come to atone by his death for the sin of Adam and free all humans from the penalty of death. Paul was thus the originator of Milton's *Paradise Lost*! The prophecies in the Scriptures could all be constrained by allegorical reinterpretation to yield the required new meaning. And since the world had changed and expanded so that now it was the Roman Empire that was practically 'the world', the new religion had to be carried to the heart of the Empire and preached in Rome and Athens and Alexandria.

Having completely changed the core of Judaism, Paul nevertheless could not shed off much of his Jewish convictions and personal traits. He had much of the rigidity and narrowness of literal understanding that Jesus had censured in the learned Jewish teachers; his morality queerly mixed elements of Jesus' loving morality with rigid intolerant rulings especially concerning women, reversing the liberalizing teaching of Jesus; he could be harsh, fierce, and merciless — characteristics which seeped into established Christianity, confirmed by the teaching of Augustine. He would have insisted on the requirement of ritual male circumcision had that not impeded the spread of the new religion among the non-Jews.

VI

The three Synoptic Gospels apparently and the Forth Gospel decidedly came into being only after the Pauline teaching had spread and had been adopted by fairly large groups. The Synoptic Gospels were compilations picked up from earlier, but still not contemporary, accounts. Thus Matthew, wishing to collect as many as possible of the sayings of Jesus in one place, begins at Chapter V with the well-known benedictions which are fully in the spirit of the

teaching of Jesus as I see it; but not content with that, he goes on to collect any sayings he finds wherever he finds them, running all through Chapters V, VI and VII. While this additional material contains much that is beautiful and spiritually inspiring, it also contains much that is not compatible with the spirit of these fine teachings. We repeatedly have threats of casting into hell fire and callings for plucking out of eyes and cutting off of hands, beside sayings that reek of acrimony and vengeance.

The Church authorities who, after some considerable time, settled the contents of the canonical New Testament, were not very wise or very fortunate in selecting the Gospels to be included out of the plethora of Gospels that came forth during the first century of the Christian era. However of the four Gospels selected the authorities were right in giving precedence to Matthew. It is the most ample and comes nearest to having some system. In the first four chapters Matthew tries to proceed chronologically. First he gives a genealogy of Jesus. The very first verse proclaims: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Alas! there’s a fly in the ointment! At 1:16 we have: “And Jacob begat Joseph

the husband of Mary. Of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” which either contradicts the story of the immaculate conception or otherwise undermines the labouriously wrought genealogy, as Jesus would not be truly the son of David after all.

In Chapters V-VII Matthew collects the ‘sayings’ as mentioned above. In Chapter VIII we begin to have a collection of miracles but soon there is a mixture of miracles, parables, and narration.

For some of the miracles a rational explanation is easy to find, such as the repeated instances of feeding a crowd of hundreds or thousands when the disciples only had a few fishes and a few loaves of bread with them. Peasants, when they go out on an outing of some duration, never fail to carry with them some food. When Jesus directed the disciples to seat the crowds in smaller groups, he offered the fish and the loaves the disciples had to those next to him. Everybody then took out what food he had and all shared with all in a spirit of amity and goodwill. We are told that the leftovers filled so many baskets. Where did

the baskets come from? They were already there. Some of the crowd had brought their food in baskets, others wrapped in a napkin, etc. As to the other miracles, we know how readily miracles crop up about a remarkable personality, a Gautama the Buddha, a Plato, or a Julius Caesar.

At Mtt.21:19 we have the irrational, intemperate, inconsiderate, and merciless story of the fig tree that was condemned to wither away for no reason other than that there were no figs thereon when it was not the proper time for it to carry figs.

The Parables also are unequal. Most are beautiful, profoundly insightful and inspiring. But at 22:1-13 we have the parable of the king “who made a narriage feast”, and a who destroyed not only the original invitees who declined the invitation but we are further told that, when among those who attended, one was found who had not put on a wedding garment, the king ordered the servants saying, “Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnash-

ing of teeth.” This is merciless and however it may be interpreted or allegorized, it still permits the likes of Paul and Augustine to condone hell fire for the majority of humans, including all unbaptized infants. Much cruelty and ferocity in Church institutions and in individual churchmen is justified by such texts.

VII

Mark looks like an abridged version of Matthew, if it is not the other way round and Matthew happens to be an expanded version based on Mark. The Second Gospel opens with the words “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It skips the miraculous birth, and goes straight to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Thereafter it is simply a collection of miracles and little else. The account of the last days and hours in Jesus’ life mainly follows Matthew and also agrees with Matthew in making the two robbers crucified on left and right of Jesus share in mocking him. Concerning the various accounts of the days following the crucifixion I may have something to say later on.

VIII

The Gospel of Luke in one way, and only in one way, differs from its two companions in the Synoptic group. In the main it is a compilation of the same miracles, parables, and sayings, taken from the same source(s) as, or directly from one or the other of, its two companions. But the author or rather the compiler of the third Gospel is a poet and myth maker of the highest calibre. The first three chapters are sheer poetry and myth-making, as imaginative and as beautiful as anything in Hesiod or Pindar, and I believe it is original in the sense that it is not reproduced from an earlier source.

Curiously, in these first three poetic chapters the Messiah concept remains close to the original Judaic conception rather than the Pauline transmutation. Thus in 1:32-33 the angel announcing the miraculous birth of Jesus to Mary says: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” And in 1:67-69 “... Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied saying, Blessed be the Lord,

the God of Israel, For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people, And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of his servant David.”

The book opens in Thucydides-like fashion: “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, etc., etc.” Then throughout three successive chapters it gives the imaginative accounts of the miraculous birth of John, of the immaculate conception and of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, of the announcement by the angels of the good news to the shepherds, etc. Then from 3:23 to 3:38 we have a genealogy, not stopping at Abraham ;ike that of Matthew, but extended to “Adam. Son of God”.

From Chapter IV onwards we have the usual medley of miracles, sayings, and parables, but at 23:40-43 Luke’s imaginative urge is alive again. While both Matthew and Mark make the two robbers crucified along with Jesus mock him, Luke makes one of them say: “Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom” and Jesus answers

him: “Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

IX

In Matthew and in Mark the accounts, tacked at the end, of what happened after the crucifixion, are flimsy, unclear, and inconsistent. Luke gives us in Chapter XXIV an extensive and detailed account and it is my conjecture that Luke thus ends his Gospel with another gift of his fertile imagination. The accounts in the other two Synoptic Gospels have signs of being subsequent annexations.

X

The Fourth Gospel does not form part of the original plan of this essay. Scholars are agreed that this Gospel was not written until late in the first century long after Paul had finished his work and established a Church based on his transmutation of the Judaic tradition. Thus the Fourth Gospel has the Pauline doctrine and creed at its foundation. But the author of that Gospel was very much under

the influence of Hellenic philosophic thought and as Paul had refashioned the Judaic tradition into a new cosmic faith, John gave that faith a metaphysical garb. The account of what followed the crucifixion covering the final two chapters raises no problem: it is a reproduction of the imaginative presentation in Luke with much embellishment.

XI

Christianity was fortunate in that in its early development it was open to Greek philosophic influences, particularly Platonic influences. That gave it some of its most precious elements of moral idealism and spiritual insight. But soon there were also negative influences. But I do not want to be drawn into that. This essay has already got out of hand and strayed far from its original conception.

D. R. Khashaba

June 20, 2020

DEMOGORGON

Demogorgon in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is commonly seen as mysterious. I find Demogorgon, as the Evil that negates Evil, corresponds to the Principle of Transience in my philosophy of Creative Eternity. Incidentally, this gives me assurance that my Creative Eternity is an integral, intelligible Whole. But the elements have to be patiently gathered from their hidden places in my scattered writings. Three, maybe four, of my books give a fairly complete view of my philosophy: *Let Us Philosophize*, *Quest of Reality*, *Creative Eternity* (which was the original title for *Let Us Philosophize*, and *In Praise of Philosophical Ignorance*.

The Principle of Transience is the metaphysical condition of creativity. If the world is ever becoming it is then neces-

sarily ever vanishing. Death is the metaphysical condition of Life. Hence I say that death is tragic but not evil.

D. R. Khashaba

June 22, 2020

CURSE OF BABEL

Philosophers were busy raising their Tower of Babel to reach Heaven and seize the Wisdom of the gods. Jehovah smote them with the second curse of Babel which was worse than the first. In the first curse he gave people different tongues. In the second curse he made philosophers speak the same words but none of them understood by a word what any of the others understood by the same word.

I have been reading an important *Aeon* article by Sam Dresser, edited by Sally Davies on Carnap and Heidegger: <https://aeon.co/essays/heidegger-v-carnap-how-logic-took-issue-with-metaphysics> I do not intend to comment on or discuss the article but will only put dpwn some thoughts triggered by certain sentences or phrases.

The curse of philosophy is that philosophers have no common language. Not that it is in the nature of things that there could ever be a common language. You never

understand what another speaks: you understand what your mind makes of what another speaks. Understanding is not an empty Lockean receptacle but an active creative agent. But while to interpret what you receive is an inescapable necessity, to mistake and to misplace its elements is a curse and this is what philosophers have been suffering for millennia. Both the word ‘metaphysics’ and the mother-word ‘philosophy’ have been subjected to grave wrong in this way.

We read that Carnap’s manifesto for the Vienna Circle “announced a philosophical revolution in which a new methodology based on logical analysis would finally put philosophy on firm footing.” Briefly I would say, logical analysis clarifies, unveils consistencies and inconsistencies. Beyond that it “says nothing” as Wittgenstein discovered. Taking logical analysis for the whole of philosophy amounts to a denial of philosophy in any meaningful sense of the term. Further on I was surprised to find that Carnap had a penetrating understanding of the metaphysical quest, but that was completely divorced of his theoretical thinking on the nature and limits of philosophy.

We read that Heidegger “wanted to think about what existence itself is – what ‘Being as such’, in his words, *is*.” How do we proceed about that? Further on we read that “he often aims for is instilling a *moment* of philosophical wonder, using a spark of existential discomfort to prompt

astonishment at the fact that we exist.” I don’t see that as a proper representation of metaphysical wonder. Metaphysical wonder is always serene. I don’t think that Socrates was in a state of ‘existential discomfort’ when he stood still from sunrise to following sunrise wrapt in meditation. In vain do we stretch Being (Reality) on the rack, torturing her with tortuous inferential thinking, to make her divulge her secret. That was the fault of all German Idealism from Leibniz through Hegel to Heidegger. Before the secret of Being (Reality) we have only humbly to confess it an Ultimate Mystery and then seek where to find her and we find her nowhere but deep deep in our very questing soul.

We read: “Heidegger’s starting point is that each of the sciences, which he understands (very) broadly to include everything from mathematics to history, concerns itself with a particular set of things in the world.” True, every ‘science’ “concerns itself with a particular set of things in the world” but that has nothing to do with philosophy and philosophy has nothing to do with that. Confounding philosophy with science has done the greatest harm both to science and to philosophy from the time of Aristotle to the present day.

I will not go into Heidegger’s jugglery with Nothing and Nothingness. I am only amazed at the refusal of philosophers to see that Plato has put the conundrum of Nothing finally to rest in the *Sophist*.

**My aching bones and fading eyes are crying for mercy
and I will stop here.**

D. R. Khashaba

June 25, 2020

MAZES OF LANGUAGE

Imperfection is inherent in the core of language. Not only are linguistic structures basically metaphorical, but the elemental terms of language, to serve the purpose of communication, must be vague and imprecise. If the terms of language were to represent every nuance and every association a word has for every individual user, communication would be impossible, or rather language would be an impossibility. The more the ideal of perfection is approached the more constrained the content of the language becomes. Such is all scientific terminology and technical jargon.

Number is a perfect language and it is completely lifeless and barren. Six times six and six groups of six ranged by one another are the same thing. An arithmetical equation or a logical proposition is, as Wittgenstein tells us,

empty and says nothing. Like a virus, number or logic only proliferates when it works on a living body.

While an arithmetical equation or a logical proposition is in itself and by itself true but empty, a living linguistic expression can never be in itself simply true. In the first place, to be true it has to be true for a mind (intelligent being) and to be true for a mind it must be interpreted, that is to say refashioned, in terms of the ideal universe of that mind – in the Forms supplied by the mind as Plato would say or in terms of that mind’s universe of discourse as I prefer to say. In the second place, the meaning and the being underlying* the linguistic expression are strictly relative to, determined by, and inseparable of everything else in the universe. That is why and how Socrates, in the elenctic examination, can discover the essential insufficiency of every statement advanced.

This is why no determinate formulation of thought or language can be free of contradiction and why every philosophical formulation must be dismantled by dialectic, as Plato insists in the *Republic*, or else it turns into dogmatic superstition.

That is why and how genuine philosophy and poetry and creative literature and art give us no truth but give us

understanding in provoking us to look within ourselves where abd where alone all meaning, all understanding, and all reality is to be found.

Dear Reader, after all I have said, do you ask what truth there is in what I have been saying? If you do, you have erred in straying to my pages and have only been wasting your valuable time.

D. R. Khashaba

June 28, 2020

***At this point I was on the point of saying “the meaning and being of the entity underlying ...” which would have been to fall into the trap of a vicious Third Man regress.**

KANT'S THREE QUESTIONS

Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* encapsulates the whole of the philosophical quest in three questions: (1) What do I know?; (2) What must I do?; (3) What can I hope for? I have more than once given brief answers to Kant's three questions. Here I shall try a fresh approach.

WHAT DO I KNOW?

Let me take a shortcut. I know what science and empiricism tell me I know. What does that amount to: In the *Republic* Plato presents an image of the sophist or the common politician. We may adapt the image to our present purpose. Let us say that the world is a huge beast. In our common practical knowledge we have acquainted ourselves with the beast, have noted its moods and habits. Scientists have closely observed the beast; they know what

pleases it, what angers it, how to make it do things for them. They know the habits of a newborn nebula; they can read the signs of a distant star; they can even anticipate the caprices of an errant meteor. But of what is beyond that or underneath that – what do we know? The Big Bang is no less a myth than “And God said, let there be light, and there was light.” Still, let us say that that is all we know and I am willing to restrict – rather to insist on restricting – the terms ‘know’ and ‘knowledge’ to this.

But I have the ideas of amity, loyalty, mercy, cruelty, greed; the ideas of equality, identity, difference; the ideas of number and point and tangent. These are decidedly not of the same nature as that to which we decided to assign the designation ‘knowledge’. We need a word other than ‘knowledge’ for these. Shall we say we do not know ideas but conceive ideas?

Again, I experience joy, grief, remorse; I have within me a certain state of being on watching the sun setting on a clear stream, on listening to music, on observing the sparkle in the eye of one I love. No matter how these states of being come about or what physical or bodily events accompany them; in themselves these states of being are something distinct. Again let us not say that we know any

of these states of being. If it were up to me I would say that we understand such states of being and I would further insist that that and only that is understanding.

Finally, in knowing, in conceiving, in understanding, as these terms have been elucidated above, I have awareness of that in me that knows, that conceives, that understands, and that power in me that knows, conceives, understands, and further that wills and creates, is the only reality worthy the name, the only reality that is immediately, evidently, intelligibly present to me – my own inmost reality. I will not say I know that reality or conceive it or understand it: that reality is itself the act of knowing, of conceiving, of understanding, of creating. That is my creative intelligence, my intelligent creativity. For short, I sometimes call it my subjectivity.

WHAT MUST I DO?

Lessing wisely said, “Kein Mensch muss muessen.”

When I am fully human, when, in Spinoza’s terminology, I have adequate ideas, I act; when, as Socrates would say, I know myself, I do what is right. To act (Spinoza), to

do what is right (Socrates), is to will what is good and do what is good.

hen my humanity is impaired, when, in Spinoza's terminology, I have inadequate ideas, when, as Socrates would say, I am ignorant, I am the victim of passion, swayed by hate and anger and unhealthy desires.

That is the essence of all morality. The truth is unbelievably simple. Socrates, Jesus, the Buddha were simple-minded, in the uncorrupted sense of the term.

Alas! We are buried in complications, errors, superstitions so huge as to leave no glimpse of hope for the rescue of humanity.

WHAT CAN I HOPE FOR?

In truth there is no justification for the intrusion of this question. Kant only brought it in to make room for his religious beliefs.

A flower blooms, withers, and is no more. I want no more than to live a human life then pass away and be no more.

To my mind, reality is creativity: in creativity becoming and vanishing are complementary; neither has any being or meaning apart from the other. Even while we are living we are constantly vanishing, then comes the final unwinding. Even to say that we return to the All or that we merge with the All is to console ourselves with a deceptive turn of phrase, for the statement in truth has no meaningful content.

D. R. Khashaba

June 29, 2020

NO HOPE FOR HUMANITY

“The greatest changes of which we have had experience as yet are due to our increasing knowledge of history and of nature. They have been produced by a few minds appearing in three or four favoured nations, in a comparatively short period of time. May we be allowed to imagine the minds of men everywhere working together during many ages for the completion of our knowledge? May not the science of physiology transform the world? Again, the majority of mankind have really experienced some moral improvement; almost every one feels that he has tendencies to good, and is capable of becoming better.”

The above words, extracted from a long buoyant passage, were written in the late nineteenth-century by Benjamin Jowett in the introduction to his translation of Plato’s *Phaedo*. It reflected a sentiment and mood which were

prevalent at te time and extended into the opening of the twentieth century. Perhaps that optimism was first checked by the shock of World War I.

How sad, how humbling, to rehearse such words in mid-2020! The Coronavirus epidemic, terrible as it is, is the least of our calamities, and if the final doom of humanity is ever chronicled, the pandemic will probably claim no more than a footnote at the tail of a page. The effective perpetrator of human annihilation will be the double-headed monster greed-plus-stupidity. Yes, stupidity, for our proud AI is nothing but stupidity incarnate! I will not explicate since I have written amply on this.

The irony of it all is that the remedy is quite simple and – had we but the understanding and the will – would be within our reach.

The downfall of humanity began when nomadic tribes abandoned their primitive way of life, settled down, and erected cities. Groups of humans came into contact with other groups. In time contacts between various human groups expanded, extended, deepened and grew. Today for the first time in history the contact, interconnection, and interdependence of human groups has become universal and fundamental. Willy-nilly humanity has become practi-

cally but not morally one tribe. In tribal life the spirit of the tribe secured peace and harmony within the tribe. Humanity cannot live in peace and harmony without the spirit of the tribe. The choice before us is simple and stark: to survive we must become one family in the truest and fullest sense of the term.

World leaders, especially in the richest and most powerful countries, are far from understanding this and it is they who are daily driving us closer to our final doom.

May the reader excuse the chaotic state of the above lines: it reflects the agitation of my mind.

D. R. Khashaba

July 4, 2020

MIND DOES NOT EXIST

When Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) titled his 1949 book *The Concept of Mind* he no doubt meant that title to signify that mind is nothing but an empty concept; there is no such a thing as mind; mind does not exist. To gratify Ryle and all Empiricists, and to exem[iify how Language will obligingly say whatever anyone will want her to say, I will not only readily grant what Empiricists say of mind but will emphasize it and insist on it.

Mind is am idea and it is not in the nature of an idea to exist: for to exist (according to my terminology) is to be a definite, finite, determinate object. To be an object is to be hemmed, constrained, determined by what it is not, or simply, in Parmenidean language, by what is not, by nothingness.

Mind is a creative notion, a metaphysical principle, hat confers intelligibility on whatever I, as I, as a free

agent, do. I walk, I talk, I laugh, I grieve, I take a sip of coffee. All of these states and acts have physical and physiological accompaniments, but these accompaniments by themselves cannot explain, cannot make me understand, my states and acts. It is the ideas, values, aims, intents in the subjective realm of my being that confer intelligibility on my inner states and outer acts.

Empiricists believe that the physical and physiological accompaniments explain everything. I am not convinced. It is impossible to prove either position: these opposed positions are amenable neither to empirical verification nor to rational demonstration. We have here Plato's Gods and Giants (*Sophist*) inhering in two completely distinct realms. All controversy between them is waste of time and waste of breath. I only write to clarify things for readers who sympathize with the Idealist position but are perplexed by my usage of such terms as 'existene' and 'reality' because these terms have for long been steeped in the dye of the Empiricist world-view. For Empiricists these terms are synonymous; for me they are radically opposed.

D. R. Khashaba

July 15, 2020

PART TWO

EXPLORING PLATO

EXPLORING PLATO - I

Plato is a whole universe. It is true that this may be said of any human being, but of Plato it is true in a heightened and particularly profound sense. Plato, in his person no less than in his work, is full of contradictions and of dark corners. In this series of explorations I will only marginally and aa it wew in passing touch on the personal contradictions and puzzles. As a person Plato was, like every one of us, the creation of his time and circumstance. The peculiarities and the faults of that creation went the way of all flesh and had better not be stirred except where it is inevitable.

But Plato's thought is his lasting gift to humanity and the contradictions and puzzles of that thought invite exploration and have rewarded and will continue to reward serious attempts at exploration, attempts inspired by genuine wonder and puzzlement rooted in the conviction that Plato himself was exploring his own unfathomable reality. That is why the genuine explorer of Plato's thought will always find there inspiration and a flood of loght.

I intend to continue this series in the form of short meditations as long as my feeble powers and fading eyesight permit.

D. R. Khashaba

July 7, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - II

The *Republic* is generally regarded as Plato's

most important work. It is, like almost all of Plato's works, open to diverse conflicting and contradictory interpretations. To my mind, it is the heart and core of Plato's philosophy and of all genuine philosophy – and that precisely because it offers no definable philosophy.

The *Republic* begins like a casual question about the nature of 'justice' but early in the inquiry we are repeatedly told that what we are really looking into is what life is best for a human being. The preliminary discussion is indecisive. Glaucon and Adeimantus insist that Socrates show that the life of justice is the best, regardless of any rewards or penalties. Socrates proposes to construct imaginatively a model ideal city in the expectation that justice would be more easily detectable on the larger scale of the city.

Socrates first presents a model of the barest minimum of necessities. Glaucon is not satisfied' he wants the citizens to be more comfortable. Socrates says the simple model he presented is the model of a healthy city but proceeds to develop the model. Soon we find that we will need to have a professional army. Ironically, the army that came into being by the exigencies of the 'unhealthy' city is found to provide us with the guardians and rulers of the ideal city.

To equip our guardians and rulers for their vital role we have to give them the best possible education and culture. In short, we must make them philosophers. This brings us to the heart and core of the *Republic* (from the later part of Book V to the end of Book VII).

Who is a philosopher? The genuine philosopher is one who aspires to Reality. He does not find that Reality in the multiple things of the outer world but plunges for it in the ocean of ideas in his own mind. He sinks into the depths of his inner reality, his soul. He senses the affinity of his soul to all Reality. That affinity is the source and fount of all light, of the intelligibility in which his inner being is bathed. The Reality for which he aspired is indistinguishable from that very aspiration. The exploration of the philosopher's inner reality does not yield any specific, any determinate thought or truth: the aspiration, the yearning is itself the reality, the light, the life of intelligence which

gives birth to beauty and love and understanding. The aspiration, the yearning, is the philosophic life.

What I have been saying in the above lines I find clearly spoken in what I have no hesitation in designating the most seminal passage in the whole of philosophic literature, *Republic* 490a-b.

Back to where we left the *Republic*. Continuing to speak of the education of the philosopher, Socrates mentions the highest study. His interlocutors persist in asking him what that study is. He enigmatically says that the Form of the Good is the highest study. To my mind (and this is something I have repeatedly affirmed and re-affirmed over the years) Plato did not say and did not mean to say that the study of the Firm of the Good is the highest study but that the Form of the Good is the highest study. When Socrates is asked what the Firm of the Good is, he offers an allegory: The sun is the child of the Form of the good and as the sun is the source of light and life and growth, the Form of the Good is the source of all life and all understanding. To my mind, the Form of the Good is Plato's supreme myth, the image of ultimate Reality that can never be communicated in any specific or determinate formulation of thought or language but can only be intimated in oracular myth and parable.

Philosophy is an aspiration and the aspiration never dries up as long as the philosopher's intelligence is alive. Hence the philosophical life is an endless exploration of the philosopher's inner reality, an endless exploration that gives birth to oracular myths and parables intimating the philosopher's insight into his own inner reality. The builders of philosophic systems, from Aristotle through Leibniz to Hegel, fool themselves in mistaking their systems for final truths.

Socrates right at the beginning said that what we are really looking into is the best possible life for a human being. We do not go far wrong if we conclude that the best life is the philosophic life and that philosophy itself is nothing other than that philosophic life, the lifelong exercise of intelligence which yields no knowledge and no truth* but gives birth to works of beauty and deeds of love.

D. R. Khashaba

July 9, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - III

For a change I have met with a scholarly understanding of Plato with which I am completely in accord. In my writings over more than two decades I have lamented the corrupt understanding of Platonic Idealism and of the so-called Theory of Forms initiated by Aristotle and followed by scholars as unquestionable truth ever since. (See the frustrated series “Approaches to Plato” included in *The World Within*, 2020;) Joh M. Cooper, in his Introduction to the *Complete Works of Plato* has a long passage that I wish every student of philosophy would absorb. The passage is too long to quote in full: I reproduce below excerpted sentences and phrases. The whole Introduction is well worth a close study: it is readily accessible on the net.

“It was characteristic of philosophy before Socrates and Plato that philosophers usually put themselves forward as possessors of special insight and wisdom ...

“Socrates was a totally new kind of Greek philosopher. ... All that he knew, humbly, was how to reason

and reflect ... doing his best to make his own moral, practical opinions, and his life itself, rest on appropriately tested and examined reasons...

“In writing Socratic dialogues ... Plato was following Socrates in rejecting the earlier idea of the philosopher as wise man who hands down the truth to other mortals ... It is important to realize that whatever is stated in his works is stated by one or another of his characters, *not* directly by Plato ... it is in the writing as a whole that the author speaks, not in the words of any single speaker ... In all this, Plato is being faithful to Socrates’ example: the truth must be arrived at by each of us for ourselves, in a cooperative search, and Plato is only inviting others to do their own intellectual work, in cooperation with him, in thinking through the issues that he is addressing.

“One might attend here to what Plato has Socrates say at the end of *Phaedrus* about written discourses. ...”

To argue against those who advocate Aristotle’s acceptance of a definitely formulated ‘Theory of Forms’ is useless: first, they will not question the holy writ of Aristotle; secondly, they will adduce the letter of Plato’s poetic language and the particulars of his flights of imagination. I have repeatedly given in my writings my alternative reading of the Socratic-Platonic Forms. (See especially *In*

Praise of Philosophical Ignorance, 2018) Here I want to add a few explanatory remarks.

To say that Plato does not offer a definitively formulated philosophy is not to say that Plato does not have a coherent, integral philosophical vision. But he tells us plainly (principally in the *Phaedrus*) that philosophical vision or insight cannot be contained in a fixed formulation of thought or language. Every student of Plato should draw for himself the personal understanding he derives for himself from the works of Plato. That is the whole aim and purpose of philosophizing, that everyone should form for himself a coherent, integrated, vision to give meaning and value to ne's life.

It is often asserted that Plato in his late works discarded his 'Theory of Forms' and the *Parmenides* is said to show that Plato discovered the error of that theory. That is nonsense. The first part of the *Parmenides* criticizes not the 'doctrine' AAof Forms but various modes of verbally relating the Form to the particular instance. In the nature of thiings there could be no satisfactory mode of expressing the relation for the simple reason that the attempt creates a duality where there is in truth unity. Furthermore, the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible remains fundamental in all of Plato's works down to the very end. I expect that in this series of Explorations there will be ample opportunity to show this, as far as my general

condition and my continually dimming eyesight will permit.

Having mentioned the late dialogues, let me say a word about the marked difference in style between the latest group of dialogues and the earlier ones. I imagine that, after the establishment of the Academy Plato became progressively more engaged in the problems and interests of theoretical study and research. I think this explains Plato's experimentations in the method of hypothesis, collection and division, the examination of schools of thought that were cropping all around the Hellenic world, etc.

D. R. Khashaba

July 12, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - IV

What is Plato's *Theaetetus* about? The simplest answer is: about knowledge. Does this make it a work of Epistemology? Only if Epistemology is properly understood, which is a very rare thing indeed.

The *Theaetetus* is akin in many ways to the early Socratic discourses, but most importantly in this, that it ends negatively; but it is the blessed, pregnant negativity of genuine philosophical inquiry. For the end of the philosophical travail is not to reach any knowledge but to lead us to where we stand face to face with an ultimate mystery and to acknowledge that it is an ultimate mystery.

Plato had earlier acknowledged the nature of knowledge as an ultimate mystery when in the *Meno* he introduced the myth of reminiscence in response to the puzzle of how it is that we know anything at all. In the *The-*

aetetus the examination shows that we can have many illuminating approaches to various aspects and concomitants of knowledge without arriving at the essence of knowledge. This is shown in the first round of examination with the gifted lad and is replayed in the remaining thought experiments. Philosophers coming after Plato, from Aristotle through Leibniz and Locke down to Russell, Ryle, etc. have done very useful, enlightening research, but they all share one serious fault: they think or pretend that they are revealing what knowledge is. They, all of them, Rationalists and Empiricists, do useful work on the theoretical level but none of them has been bitten by the metaphysical bug.

The metaphysical urge aspires to the above and the beyond and ends not in 'knowledge' but in philosophical ignorance, the fruit of the insight that the only reality of which we have immediate awareness is the mystic experience of our own unfathomable inner reality that can only be intimated oracularly in myth and parable. Thus Plato in the *Republic*, having represented ultimate Reality as the Idea of the Good, can give no account of the Idea of the Good other than the simile of the sun, donor of life and light and growth.

Every work of Plato is an inexhaustible fount of inspiration, but the *Theaetetus* is so in an especial degree. Every line suggests new thoughts and new approaches. I have previously written three studies of the dialogue: (1) Chapter Nine of *Plato: An Interpretation*, 2005; (2) “Plato’s Examination of Knowledge” included in *Metaphysical Reality*, 2014; (3) “The *Theaetetus*” included in *Spaces in Spaceless Thought*, 2019; none of which I find quite satisfactory. If I could have the energy and if my fading eyesight permitted, I would have made a fresh study. The distinction between things known through the senses and the higher level ideas (184-5) can throw light on the divisions of ‘the straight line’ in *Republic* VI. (This also recurs, I think, in *Hippias Major*.) I also find a new interpretation for ‘the dream’ (201 ff.) which I previously dismissed, perhaps misled by the scholarly search for its source. But all that is now, I am afraid, beyond what I can reasonably hope to achieve.

D. R. Khashaba

July 15, 2020

While the *Phaedrus* as a work of art flows uniformly as a whole with the smoothness of a clear stream of water, it can yet, from a certain angle, be seen as consisting of two distinct parts. The first part gives us the winged myth of

the winged soul soaring to the celestial abode of the intelligible Forms. This is poetry allegorically intimating profound philosophical insight. Only a mentality bereft of any metaphysical sense is capable of a grossly literal reading of the myth. The second part (257c ff.) is a philosophic examination of rhetoric. Although this part has received much scholarly attention, I maintain that its crucial message has been generally ignored. To explain what I mean by this, I will have to quote extensively from a lengthy passage (275c-276a, translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff) that has mostly received only passing notice.

“...those who think they can leave written instructions for an art, as well as those who accept them, thinking that writing can yield results that are clear or certain, must be quite naïve ... writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You’d think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. ... And when it is faulted and at-

tacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. ... can we discern another kind of discourse? ... a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent."

The whole passage from which the above phrases have been excerpted must, first, be understood as earnestly intended, and must, secondly, be taken not only with the discussion of rhetoric within which the passage occurs but also with the insistence in the *Republic* on the necessity undermining by dialectic of the ground hypotheses of every philosophical position (*Republic* 533c).

The examination of rhetoric in the context of which our passage occurs shows clearly that the requirements of a true art of rhetoric are humanly unattainable. At this point permit me to quote another passage, a short one this time:

"Well, isn't the method of medicine in a way the same as the method of rhetoric? ... In both cases we need to determine the nature of something —of the body in medicine, of the soul in rhetoric. Otherwise, all we'll

have will be an empirical and artless practice. We won't be able to supply, on the basis of an art, a body with the medicines and diet that will make it healthy and strong, or a soul with the reasons and customary rules for conduct that will impart to it the convictions and virtues we want. ... Do you think, then, that it is possible to reach a serious understanding of the nature of the soul without understanding the nature of the world as a whole?" (270b-c, tr. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff.)

This passage as I read it clearly spells the utter impossibility of there ever being a science of rhetoric; this is consonant with the assertion that there can never be a definitive formulation of thought or language free from contradiction. This is the ground of the requirement in the *Republic* that dialectic should regularly destroy the basic assumptions of any philosophical position, otherwise those assumptions turn into dogmatic superstitions – the fate not only of the creeds of institutionalized religions but also of haughty metaphysical systems that claim finality.

As I have been reiterating in all my writings, metaphysical insight – being essentially a mystic experience – cannot be conveyed in any theoretical structure, but can only be intimated in oracular myth and parable. Such is my reading of the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Re-*

public, and, as I see it, this reading alone will free metaphysical philosophy from the dual error of seeking chimerical objective knowledge or vacuous mathematical certainty.

D. R. Khashaba

July 2-, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - V

Prefatory:

This series of ‘explorations’ was triggered when I started ‘reading’ (actually listening to) the *Complete works of Plato* edited by John M. Cooper. In the third paper of the series I spoke with brimming enthusiasm of my full agreement with Cooper’s reading of the dialogues. I regret to say that Cooper’s Introduction to the translation of the *Parmenides* (by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan*) completely reversed that. I had several times previously commented on the *Parmenides* and I was thinking that I would have nothing to add on the subject in the present series. Having found Cooper voicing the sanctioned scholarly reading of the dialogue, against which I have been campaigning for over two decades, I now find it necessary to restate my position. I refrain from commenting directly on Cooper’s reading, which actually adds nothing to the common scholarly reading. I think it more useful to comment on salient

points in the First Part of the dialogue, only adding a few general remarks on the Second Part.

***All quotations from the *Parmenides* below are from this translation.**

I

The *Parmenides* has, more than any other Platonic dialogue, been open to opposed and contradictory readings. It is said that Plotinus found the whole of his philosophy in this dialogue. This is an exaggeration. Plotinus must have read the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus* into the *Parmenides*. But to a mind aspiring to the ultimate One and the All any examination of the ideas of One, Being, Not-Being cannot but be a rich source of ontological insights.

II

I find it necessary in the first place to explain once more my understanding of the Socratic-Platonic principle of the intelligible form.

Socrates was wholly occupied with the moral question: how can we live the best life possible for a human being? He found that in our proper nature as human beings we are governed by ideas, ideals, values, aims, that are

found in the mind and only in the mind. Thus these ideas (using this as a blanket term) are essentially intelligible as opposed to the particular perceptible things in the objective world. These ideas, just as they do not come to us from the outer world and are not, as essences, to be found in the outer world, they also do not receive their meaning from the outer world. It is the intelligible that gives meaning to the particular instance, it is the idea that makes the objective thing meaningful.

In *Phaedo* 95e-101e the principle is extended – no matter by whom – to all things. Thus in that seminal passage of the *Phaedo* we find that (a) it is the intelligible idea of growth that confers on the successive states of a growing plant unity and intelligibility; (b) it is the intelligible idea of number that gives ‘one’, ‘two’, ‘three’ their meaning: apart from the idea any group of things is a visual or palpable configuration but is not numbered; (c) it is Socrates’ ideals of loyalty and duty that explain his staying put in his prison awaiting execution.

The reader will appreciate that I am putting in a few lines thoughts that I have been expounding in numerous books and essays: to further clarify what I have been trying to put forward let me call to my aid two spirits kindred to Plato’s spirit. When Plotinus says that only a soul become beautiful can see beauty in anything, he is unfolding the insight in Socrates’ dictum: It is by Beauty that all

things beautiful are beautiful. Shelley no doubt has the absolute Beauty of *Symposium* in mind when, in his inspired “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” he says:

“Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate

“With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon

“Of human thought or form”.

III

I imagine that by the time the *Parmenides* was written certain members of the Academy had already turned the Soccratic-Platonic notion of the intelligible forms into a fast theory: that is the error which Plato was intent to correct in the *Sophist*, ascribing it to certain Friends of the Forms (*Sophist* 248-9). It may be that what I have been castigating as Aristotle’s corruption of the Forms was not originated by Aristotle. He mistakenly ascribed the corrupt understanding of the Friends of the Forms to the Master.

I will comment at length on the First Part. For the Second Part a few general remarks will suffice.

The criticisms in the First Part of the dialogue would be targeting that corruption. I will now go through 127c ff.,

commenting on salient points in detail and beg the reader's forbearance.

IV

When Zeno has read his treatise giving proofs of the contradictions entailed in postulating the existence of the manifold, Socrates says it's no wonder that the existence of many particular like or unlike objects should involve contradiction. It would be truly a wonder if the ideas of Likeness and Unlikeness were shown to be contradictory. (This distinction had already been underlined in the *Phaedo*.)

'Parmenides' interposes and asks Socrates if he himself has drawn the distinction between the ideas (forms) and the particular objects in which the ideas are exemplified. He next asks him whether he says there are forms of Justice, Temperance, etc. Socrates answers affirmatively. Next, whether he says there are forms of body, etc. Socrates hesitates. Of mud, dirt, hair? Socrates is indignant. Perhaps Plato here wanted to indicate that the extension of ideas to all things was a development of his own, or it may be that this was a dramatic move to portray the youthful Socrates not yet in full possession of the notion of the intelligible idea.

In the course of the conversation of Socrates with both Zeno and Parmenides the particular instances are said to have a share of the idea. In the *Phaedo* the expressions ‘share’,

‘participate’, partake’, etc., were indifferently used to relate the object to the idea. Once we try to relate the idea and the object as concepts we necessarily have to resort to metaphor. This is the nemesis of language and of all thinking in abstractions – glory be to Bergson!

V

The whole of the extended criticism in the First Part simply shows the inescapable contradictoriness of trying to relate the idea and the exemplification as two things, whereas in truth there is but one thing. The objective thing as a natural thing has, strictly speaking, no meaning. It is by the idea that it becomes meaningful: the idea is all the meaning the thing has for us.

To see the First Part of the *Parmenides* as a rejection or falsification of the so-called ‘Theory of Forms’ is a doubly confounded error. There is and there has never been any such theory apart from that concocted by the ‘Friends of yhe Forms’, assumed by Aristotle to be Plato’s, and inherited and unquestioningly believed by the learned..

The criticism concerns modes of expression with which Plato experimented but with which he was never satisfied. The principle of the Intelligible Idea remains fundamental in Socrates' thought and in Plato's thought to the very end.

To say that the intelligible ideas do not appear in the *Theaetetus* or the *Sophist* is a case of pathological denial. If the intelligible idea is not prominent in Plato's late works this is easily explained by the circumstance that Plato's interest in those late dialogues was not principally metaphysical but theoretical (methodological, etc.)

At the end of the critical examination 'Parmenides' explicitly and clearly affirms the necessity of the principle of the intelligible idea, saying" "Yet on the other hand, Socrates, if someone, having an eye on all the difficulties we have just brought up and others of the same sort, won't allow that there are forms for things and won't mark off a form for each one, he won't have anywhere to turn his thought, since he doesn't allow that for each thing there is a character that is always the same. In this way he will destroy the power of dialectic entirely."

VI

The dialectical exercise in the Second Part of the *Parmenides* is in full agreement with the *Phaedrus* assertion of the impossibility of adequately confining philosophical insight

in any determinate formulation of language or thought and agrees further with the *Republic* insistence on the necessity of the undoing by dialectic of the foundational hypotheses of any philosophical position. That this is the purpose of the Second Part is explicitly stated by Parmenides towards the end of the First Part and is confirmed by Parmenides' concluding summation: "Let us then say this – and also that, as it seems, whether one is or is not, it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other."

VII

At many points in the dialectic exercise the argument is false, the error consisting in postulating a fictitious duality. These do not affect the overall scheme of the dialectic exercise.

VIII

Basically the arguments in the dialectic exercise demonstrate the treachery of verbal argument since language can never be equal to reality.

IX

Basically, and this is the first ground of the dialectic, any determinate statement is conditioned by its negative and is thus grounded in its own negation. That is just what we mean when we say that no determinate statement can be immune to contradiction. That again is the reason why pure abstract reasoning, that is, reasoning in pure abstractions, can yield no definitive truth. That is what Kant demonstrates in the Antinomies of Pure Reason.

X

Let us say in passing that all of this has nothing to do with metaphysical philosophy. Metaphysical philosophy is only concerned with Reality and we only encounter Reality in the mystical experience of our awareness of our innermost, unfathomable reality, which can only be intimated in creative imaginative myth, parable, and metaphor. All the high-sounding reasoned systematic edifices of so-called metaphysicians have no more substance than the elephants and giraffes a child shapes in passing clouds.

D. R. Khashaba

July 18, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - VI

While the *Phaedrus* as a work of art flows uniformly as a whole with the smoothness of a clear stream of water, it can yet, from a certain angle, be seen as consisting of two distinct parts. The first part gives us the winged myth of the winged soul soaring to the celestial abode of the intelligible Forms. This is poetry allegorically intimating profound philosophical insight. Only a mentality bereft of any metaphysical sense is capable of a grossly literal reading of the myth. The second part (257c ff.) is a philosophic examination of rhetoric. Although this part has received much scholarly attention, I maintain that its crucial message has been generally ignored. To explain what I mean by this, I will have to quote extensively from a lengthy passage (275c-276a, translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff) that has mostly received only passing notice.

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so with the insistence in the *Republic* on the necessity undermining by dialectic of the ground hypotheses of every philosophical position (*Republic* 533c).

The examination of rhetoric in the context of which our passage occurs shows clearly that the requirements of a true art of rhetoric are humanly unattainable. At this point permit me to quote another passage, a short one this time:

“Well, isn’t the method of medicine in a way the same as the method of rhetoric? ... In both cases we need to determine the nature of something —of the body in medicine, of the soul in rhetoric. Otherwise, all we’ll have will be an empirical and artless practice. We won’t be able to supply, on the basis of an art, a body with the medicines and diet that will make it healthy and strong, or a soul with the reasons and customary rules for conduct that will impart to it the convictions and virtues we want. ... Do you think, then, that it is possible to reach a serious understanding of the nature of the soul without understanding the nature of the world as a whole?” (270b-c, tr. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff.)

This passage as I read it clearly spells the utter impossibility of there ever being a science of rhetoric; this is consonant with the assertion that there can never be a defini-

tive formulation of thought or language free from contradiction. This is the ground of the requirement in the *Republic* that dialectic should regularly destroy the basic assumptions of any philosophical position, otherwise those assumptions turn into dogmatic superstitions – the fate not only of the creeds of institutionalized religions but also of haughty metaphysical systems that claim finality.

As I have been reiterating in all my writings, metaphysical insight – being essentially a mystic experience – cannot be conveyed in any theoretical structure, but can only be intimated in oracular myth and parable. Such is my reading of the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Republic*, and, as I see it, this reading alone will free metaphysical philosophy from the dual error of seeking chimerical objective knowledge or vacuous mathematical certainty.

D. R. Khashaba

July 2-, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - VII

The *Lysis* and the *Euthydemus* are seemingly opposed in every possible way but yet are at one in revealing the treachery of language which can readily be enrolled in the service of the meanest as of the highest purposes.

But to say that is to wrong language, for the root of the evil is not in language but in things, or

more truly said, in thingness. To exist is to be twin to nothingness since the existent is necessarily conditioned by what it is not. The world is essentially imperfect: If the totality of the conditions that make up its actuality were fulfilled the result would be Nothing. I need not labour the point: prophets and poets have been preaching it for millennia.

My intention here is to link all this to the ‘divided line’ (*Republic* 509 ff.), specifically to one subsection of the divided line. Plato names the subsection below the highest

dianoia and assigns to it the concepts of things. Plato was of course writing at a time when modern natural (particularly physical) science was still far off in the future, but I have repeatedly said that that is where Plato would place our most advanced and most sophisticated science; this, no doubt, must have shocked many.

Modern readers find it hard to follow Plato when, in the *Phaedo*, he dilates on the necessary imperfection and erroneousness of all knowledge of things in the natural world. They are not helped even by Kant's amply reasoned assertion that empirical science is confined to and cannot pass beyond the phenomenal.

Amazement at the practical achievements of science and technology blinds us to the inevitable limitations of objective knowledge. And though good scientists at heart know the truth they rarely give voice to it and when they do their words are soon forgotten, sometimes even by themselves. Though Stephen Hawking spoke well of the limits of scientific theory, he at times strained towards the unattainable.

It is useless to argue against the irrational faith in the powers of science, but thinkers who know better should declare the dangers inherent in the science superstition.

What has science, as science, done to give us a better world organization? What has science\, as science, done to remove the shame of luxury breeding poverty, of abundance parading beside famine? The pseudo-science of Economics even fuels the evil.

Now the miracles of digitalization are threatening to turn humans into machines and at the top of digital government we, all of us, are nothing but numbers fed into a stupid ‘intelligent’ machine.

In the final chapter of *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) I wrote that if a cosmic catastrophe wiped out humankind, God would surely heave a sigh of relief.

May the reader forgive me this outburst in which I say nothing but merely vent my anger at a human race destroying itself, being gluttoned with knowing but bereft of understanding.

D. R. Khashaba

July 21, 3020

EXPLORING PLATO – VIII

By common consent, the *Protagoras* is a dramatic masterpiece. The portrayal of the numerous active characters, of their traits and sentiments, is the work of genius.

Throughout the whole runs the unifying central theoretical theme of the teachability of virtue. The question receives no definite answer for in truth it has no simple answer.

Protagoras professes to teach virtue. Socrates does not merely question Protagoras's claim but raises the more fundamental issue of the teachability of virtue. Protagoras advances an insightful creation fable suggesting that the sense of justice is implanted in human nature.

I am convinced that even in the brutes we can clearly discern sympathy, empathy, fellow feeling. Very little children evince joy in giving, in sharing . It is the complexity of human needs and desires compounded by the clashes

and conflicts of societal living that confuse, smother, and pervert our congenital innocence.

Consistently with all of this, Socrates emphatically denied that he taught anyone virtue, that he inculcated or instilled virtue from outside. He helped his interlocutors clear the confusions, complications, obfuscations, what hid from them their own true nature and true good. Commentators who think that Socrates contradicts and reverses his position misread the whole situation.

Protagoras in supporting his position regarding the teachability of virtue mentions justice, modesty, piety, courage, as parts of virtue. Socrates asks: Are these parts distinct from one another in the same way as eyes, nose, ears are distinct parts of a face or are they rather like parts of a piece of gold all similar to one another? Protagoras says they are distinct from one another. Socrates argues for their homogeneity; they are various manifestations of understanding or wisdom. (Socrates uses the word *epistēmē*, ‘knowledge’, a misfortunate choice of word.) Here I have two remarks to make:

First, in all of the early (elenctic) Socratic discourses we find the various traditional virtues merging into one another and uniting in *epistēmē*. Obviously this is not com-

patible with any view of the complete separation of the forms or of the separate objective ‘existence’ of the forms in a world of their own. This completely undermines the ill-famed ‘Theory of Forms’, whether we owe it to Aristotle or to certain ‘Friends of the Forms’ among members of the Academy.

Secondly, the arguments adduced by Socrates – some reasonable, some plausible, some patently bad – never finally prove anything and are never meant by Socrates (Plato) as valuable in themselves but as explorations hopefully evoking insight into one’s own inner reality.

The examination of the teachability and of the unity of virtue in the *Protagoras* falls into two parts separated by the digression on the poem of Simonides.

Protagoras at one point modifies his position. Justice, modesty, piety, may be similar to one another, but courage, he maintains, is decidedly different. Socrates shows that courage too is essentially wisdom or understanding – understanding what is truly harmful and to be shunned and what, contrary to appearances, is truly beneficial and to be welcomed. This is perfectly consistent with Socrates’ conviction that the only final good for a human being is the health and soundness of one’s soul; that moral good is

what prospers the health of the soul and moral evil is what hampers the health of the soul. This of course is what we find clearly stated in the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Gorgias*.

To clarify this and bring it nearer to common understanding Socrates resorts to what in modern jargon we would call a thought experiment. Adopting for the sake of argument the assumption that in all we do seek pleasure and avoid pain, Socrates makes up something like a calculus of pleasure and pain, showing that if we calculated correctly we would never forgo a greater but dimly discerned pleasure for a lesser immediately present pleasure. In the same way, if we were wise we would never let a lesser present good or evil overcome a greater distant good or evil. Thus the wise in war choose death with honour over safety with dishonor, which shows that courage after all is inseparable of wisdom.

Learned scholars have seen here evidence of Socrates' hedonism. With all due respect for their learning, I can only see in this narrowness of vision and short-sightedness. Socrates and Plato probably differed in their attitude towards pleasure but neither of them was either an ascetic or

a hedonist. Their difference was not a difference of outlook but of personal temperament.

D. R. Khashaba

July 22, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - IX

It seems that the dramatist in Plato found some special attraction in the character of Hippias of Elia, though he probably knew him only by report. He named two dialogues after him, each a biting comedy of character. The *Lesser Hippias* in particular has been misconstrued because the comic intent in it has been overlooked.

I do not intend to dwell on the *Greater Hippias* but will only make two brief remarks.

In the opening passage Plato highlights the man's vain bragging which, to anyone having an idea of Socrates' philosophy is tantamount to the height of ignorance. Throughout, Hippias fails to sense Socrates' thinly veiled irony.

In a long passage (297e ff.) Socrates introduces and amply illustrates the important notion of a higher level (pure) idea, which is completely lost on Hippias.

In the shorter dialogue, Hippias has just been discouraging on Homer. He says that Homer shows Achilles to be the best, wisest, and most truthful of the heroes, while he shows Odysseus to be wily and a liar. Hippias having further said that to be wily is to be powerful, Socrates leads him by a tricky argument to the paradoxical conclusion that “the more powerful and better soul, when it does injustice, will do injustice voluntarily, and the worthless soul involuntarily” (tr. *Nicholas D. Smith*). Commentators have been puzzled by this paradox which flatly contradicts Socrates’ firm conviction of the identity of virtue and wisdom.

The puzzlement comes from a superficial reading blind to the context and the intent of the argument.

The argument is not seriously meant; it issues from the dramatic setting and intent of the dialogue which sarcastically portrays the empty bombast of Hippias.

The argument may be characterized as sophistical. In principle, you can logically prove or disprove any position depending on the meaning you attach to this or that word. Socrates’ argument, though not seriously meant, correctly draws what follows from Hippias’s assumption that wile and craftiness is power. For Socrates and Plato power is always power to do good. The virtue of a thing is what that

thing does best. Socrates repeatedly argues in the dialogues that in all expertise (medicine or carpentry or shoemaking) the expert as expert does not work for his own benefit but for the good of the object of his service. Seen in this light, the argument is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Hippias's assumption.

Even as it stands, the paradox loses its paradoxicality if we take it as coming with a hidden proviso: One who does wrong voluntarily – if that were possible – would be superior to one who does wrong involuntarily. “If that were possible” – but that, according to Socrates' deepest convictions – is not possible.

Plato wrote for intelligent readers who think for themselves. That is why an intelligent reading and an unintelligent reading of one and the same text can reach contradictory interpretations.

D. R. Khashaba

July 23, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - X

In Book I of the *Republic* Socrates repeatedly affirms that what we are considering is what life is the best for a human being. As every student of philosophy knows, despite all of Socrates' arguments, his adversary, Thrasymachus, remains unconvinced. Not far from the end of Book I we have the following revealing exchange:

“Come, then, Thrasymachus, I said, answer us from the beginning. You say that complete injustice is more profitable than complete justice?”

“I certainly do say that, and I’ve told you why.

“Well, then, what do you say about this? Do you call one of the two a virtue and the other a vice?”

“Of course.

“That is to say, you call justice a virtue and injustice a vice?”

“That’s hardly likely, since I say that injustice is profitable and justice isn’t.

“Then, what exactly do you say?

“The opposite.

‘That justice is a vice?

“No, just very high- minded simplicity “Then do you call being unjust being low-minded?

“No, I call it good judgment.” (348b-d, tr. *G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve*)

If we are not to deceive ourselves, we have to admit that what Thrasymachus boldly and frankly asserts represents the common conviction of the great majority of people today all over the world, including decent individuals who follow conventional values and others who pay lip-service to virtue.

Both in practice and in theory, we are not clear about the true reward of virtue. Established religions darken our vision still further with their paradises, heavens, and hells.

The true reward of virtue resides in that a life of virtue is the proper perfection of a human being. Such is the conviction of a Socrates a Marcus Aurelius, and of many a meek humble person.

The worst delusion of moral theoreticians is that they seek an end for human life beyond true human life itself. Oddly, the truth, though in a muddled and corrupt form, is shown in the case of many who are not paragons of virtue: for in our daily life we find instances of persons who would readily die rather than be untrue to what they hold to be their proper character.

Further in the discourse Socrates hints at the truth in 353f. where, by analogy to the virtue of an eye, an ear, etc., he affirms that the soul has its perfection in the exercise of its proper power. But, as Socrates says at the beginning of Book II, all of this was a prelude,. We need the *Republic* as a whole to shed light on this insight.

As I see it, the true gist of the *Republic* is not the delineation of an ideal state but the revelation of the philosophical life as the ideal life for a human being. Thus the palpitating heart of the *Republic*, from the last part of Book V to the end of Book VII, is concerned with the philosopher and the philosophical life. The education of the philosopher leads up to the mystic vision of the Idea of the Good and, having mystically united with ultimate Reality, the philosophic soul gives birth to beautiful deeds and beautiful creations, as the prophetic passage 490a-b tells us.

This is the unfoldment of our saying that the exercise of the soul's proper is the proper perfection of the human being.

This may not come out clearly in much of what Plato says explicitly but it shines resplendently in his myths where we see all virtue, all excellence, all wisdom as an outflowing, as giving of good and creation of good, as *tokos en kalōi*.

Unfortunately, I cannot end on this optimistic note. Humans would truly enjoy the best possible life if they understood that their perfection is in loving, in giving, in the creation of beauty. But this understanding cannot be imparted by argument or reasoning or preaching. Only a good upbringing in a healthy environment can result in a healthy personality. While a good upbringing in a good family results in a decent personality, this only very rarely can escape the corrupting influences of the wider unhealthy environment. And here we encounter a knotty problem. To save humankind we need at least a majority of virtuous individuals and virtuous individuals can only be produced by a healthy, sane society. In the present world order, governed by materialist values, consumerism, greed, only an individual here or there can be decently

good. But individuals, even a Gandhi, a Schweitzer, a Mandela – what can they do in a world rotten to the core? Sadly, I can see no hope for humanity.

D. R. Khashaba

July 24, 2020

EXPLORING PLATO - XI

I warn the reader beforehand: he will not find anything in this paper that he could regret having missed.

I had completely forgotten the long introductory part of the *Timaeus*. I think the last time I had read the dialogue was when I was preparing *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005). My impression was that all of that came only in the *Critias*. Now I find that introductory part a riddle. No conjectural explanation I try to mull seems remotely satisfactory.

I had accepted the myth of the *Timaeus* as metaphysically significant and still hold to the interpretation I gave in the final chapter of *Plato: An Interpretation*, for which I later found support in Whitehead's *Process and Reality*.

Perhaps Plato's work in the Academy did shift his interests and cloud his Socratic inspiration. Anyhow, I nev-

er claimed and never intended to expound Plato's thought. I have found inspiration in Plato and would still describe my philosophy as an original version of Platonism. Yet if anyone should tell me that my interpretation of Plato is entirely erroneous I would not care to contest that. I willingly confess my indebtedness to Plato but I may have been all the time reading my own thought in Plato. This in no way affects my conviction that my philosophy offers: (1) the way out of the rut in which metaphysics has been grinding for millennia; (2) a vision which confers meaning and value on a world and a life in themselves bereft of meaning and value, and that in this respect my philosophy is kin to, say, Spinoza's or Schopenhauer's.

D. R. Khashaba

July 27, 2020

Cured am I of the insanity of reason.

Henceforth I shall chant hymns,

speak parables,

pronounce oracles.

